

Chapter Two



A sound investment and regional transit



*Bob Matsuda gives instructions to divers conducting monitoring work in Puget Sound.
Matsuda retired at the end of 1995 as special projects and research coordinator for Water Pollution Control.*

A clear victory

One of the easiest ways of determining the relative health of Lake Washington is simply to look down into it. If you're close to shore and the water is clear, you'll see rocks and sand and maybe some plant life, as well as debris tossed in by shore-side strollers. There may be a small fish or two.

It's harder in deep water, where there's nothing to be seen but the water itself. To determine how clean deep water is, scientists for years have gone out in small boats and lowered a simple white eight-inch disk on the end of a string. They measure how much string they play out before the disk disappears and then make some conclusions about cleanliness and quality.

In 1950, University of Washington scientists could see the disk when it was 12 feet deep and felt satisfied the water was clean. By 1962, when 10 treatment plants around the lake were dumping 20 million gallons of effluent into the lake daily and providing phosphates on which algae thrived, the white disk disappeared in the organic murk at about three feet. In 1966, it faded from sight at two and a half feet as the algae population grew thicker and the water looked like thin pea soup.

In 1963, Metro began piping lakeshore treatment plant effluent into new interceptor sewers as part of its \$140 million campaign to clean up the lake, the Duwamish River and Elliott Bay. Some subtle improvement in water quality soon was noted. The last of the old treatment plants was closed in 1968, and the flow of effluent into the lake ended. Scientists were ready for a slow but sure recovery of water quality.

It came quickly that summer, however. UW scientists, led by Dr. W.T. Edmondson, could see the disk at a depth of nine feet. It would get much better: in later years the disk routinely would be visible at depths of 17 to 20 feet, with a maximum depth of nearly 25 feet in 1993.

Unlike algae, which assails the eyes and the nose, some factors of water quality are invisible and can only be measured in the laboratory. Phosphorous, the element from treatment-plant effluent that fertilized algae in Lake Washington, was found in concentrations of 70 parts per billion in the 1960s. That was enough to feed the fantastic growth of algae that darkened the water and washed ashore to rot and smell. After the last lakeshore treatment plant was closed, the concentration of the chemical dropped quickly to about 16 parts per billion, a level maintained into the 1990s. Algae sightings became rare.

Metro Milestone

July 20, 1966

**West Point
Treatment Plant
dedicated.**

**Contract cost was
\$11.9 million.**

Metro Milestone

March 16, 1967

Charles V. (Tom)
Gibbs appointed
executive
director.

Protecting area waters

Water quality along Seattle's waterfront improved dramatically, literally overnight, as Metro completed its interceptors and halted the discharge of most raw sewage into Elliott Bay. In 1970, with closing of the city's old Diagonal Avenue treatment plant and completion of the Elliott Bay interceptor sewer, dissolved-oxygen levels in the Duwamish River estuary soared from a low of three tenths of a milligram per liter to more than four milligrams per liter, creating a healthier environment for marine life. Other improvements have pushed the dissolved-oxygen level to more than eight milligrams per liter in 1995, while diversion of East Division Reclamation Plant effluent from the river to Puget Sound virtually has eliminated ammonia in the river.

Completion of the Elliott Bay interceptor "made Seattle's commercial waterfront one of the cleanest in the world," Metro said modestly in a 20-year review published in 1979. Metro's work attracted favorable comment from TV newsman Walter Cronkite and from national magazines. Time magazine said in early 1969: "Unlike most cities, Seattle is doing something about the mess ... Metro succeeded in less time and at less cost than had been expected."

Underwater surveys and lab analysis of water samples from West Point showed similar improvement after the new treatment plant ended the flow of raw sewage onto the beach. The concentrated flow of effluent from the deep outfall pipe was causing no harm to the nearby marine environment.

Much of Metro's first work had been completed on or ahead of schedule. The cost was within 2 percent of estimates made in 1961.

Surely, Jim Ellis' early dictum of "doing better than promised" had been met. But the work was far from complete. The continued protection of Puget Sound and freshwater lakes and rivers would consume much of Metro's time and effort and nearly \$2 billion over the agency's lifetime.

Metro would spend more than \$300 million on pipeline extensions, reduction of combined-sewer overflows and other system improvements in its second-stage program, which began in 1966. Paying for the work required the first increase in Metro's sewer charge. The fee was bumped from \$2 a month to \$2.75 in 1971 and future increases would follow.

The cost of the third stage, which included moving the East Division Reclamation Plant outfall from the Duwamish River to Puget Sound, was \$267 million. In 1995, Metro was in the midst of its fourth stage of work, which is highlighted

by reconstruction of the West Point Treatment Plant to provide secondary treatment. The fourth stage will have a final cost of about \$1.3 billion at completion.



Keith Purves Photo

Located on the Lake Washington Ship Canal, Metro's Environmental Laboratory provides services that help protect public health and enhance area water quality.

Forward Thrust: successes and failures

In 1962, just as Metro was beginning to build the sewer lines and treatment plants that would clean up Lake Washington, four small towns proposed Metro be given transit authority.

Under the law, Bellevue, Lake Forest Park, Medina and Beaux Arts had enough clout to put the proposal on the September ballot. But they didn't have the political muscle to get it passed, and the measure was voted down, the victim of little support and public disinterest. After all, the region's attention was focused on the Seattle World's Fair that summer and fall and everyone was impressed that the recently opened Interstate 5 freeway had handled the crowds of motorists bound for the fairgrounds without many of the traffic jams that had been forecast.

Jim Ellis, the father of Metro and its legal counsel since 1958, looked around in the 1960s and saw other regional problems that needed attention: The area was short of parks and public swimming pools, its arterial streets were in poor condition and blighted by telephone and power lines, storm-drainage systems needed significant improvement, and, of course, there remained a need for a regional

transportation system. Ellis, too, was concerned about preserving open spaces and greenbelts from the suburban population that was surging toward the Cascade foothills.

With the support of other civic activists and key business and government leaders, Ellis created a group that would be called Forward Thrust (his wife, Mary Lou, suggested the name) and he became its president. The committee would identify community needs that would cost \$5 billion to satisfy.

In 1968, Forward Thrust sponsored ballot propositions totaling \$819 million, the equivalent of several billion dollars in the 1990s. Voters approved spending \$333.9 million, including \$40 million for the Kingdome and \$118 million for parks and recreation needs.

A transit plan costing \$1.15 billion and including 49 miles of rail on legs to Ballard, northeast Seattle, Bellevue and Renton was part of the Forward Thrust package. It received a favorable majority of 50.9 percent, but state law required a 60 percent majority to pass because the local share of \$385 million was to be paid from excess property taxes.

Forward Thrust returned to the ballot in 1970 with a second package of improvements costing \$625 million. It included \$440 million for a \$1.3 billion rail plan nearly identical to the 1968 proposal, \$80 million for stormwater control, \$55 million for community centers and \$40 million for public-safety buildings. As the second Forward Thrust program began taking shape, the Boeing Co., Seattle's principal employer, began making huge cuts in programs and payroll as airlines suffered through a severe recession and canceled airplane orders. Boeing was building a supersonic transport, also canceled.

Boeing employment in Washington was sliding rapidly from a high of 101,544 in January 1968, to a low of 37,200 in October 1971. Those who hadn't been laid off feared they were next. Billboards urged the last person leaving Seattle to turn out the lights.

Because of the bleak economic climate, voters were frightened about losing their jobs, keeping their homes and buying food for their families.

New taxes for civic improvements were not on any priority list, and not one Forward Thrust proposal passed. Citizen activists will remember that day in May 1970 as the dreariest and most disappointing in King County election history. Only 46.3 percent voted for the transit plan, and \$300 million in federal funds promised Seattle instead went to Atlanta, which built a rail transit system.

Metro Milestone

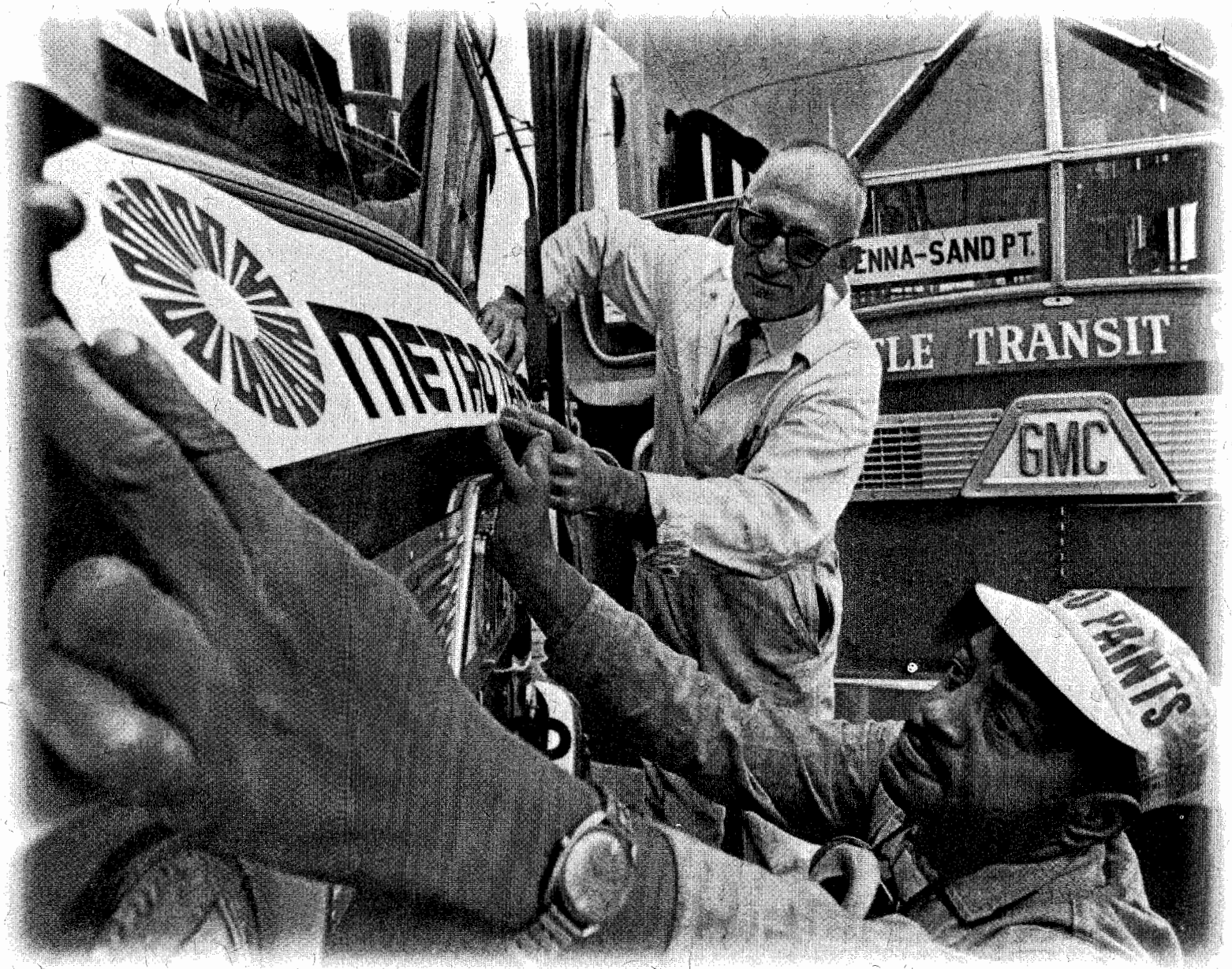
March 30, 1967

The Lake City treatment plant is closed, ending the flow of effluent to Lake Washington less than nine years after Metro was formed. Lake waters will begin to improve within the year.

Metro Milestone

Feb. 13, 1968

King County
voters reject a
Metro rail plan
proposed as part
of a Forward
Thrust package of
community
improvements.



Jerry Gay/Seattle Times Photo

*Signed and ready to roll, buses await the first day of Metro Transit operations on Jan. 1, 1973.
Applying the new Metro logo are Grover McCoy, left, and Vic Citron.*

Metro Transit gets rolling

Despite the disheartening 1970 defeat of the rail plan, the region did not hesitate in moving forward with new transportation efforts.

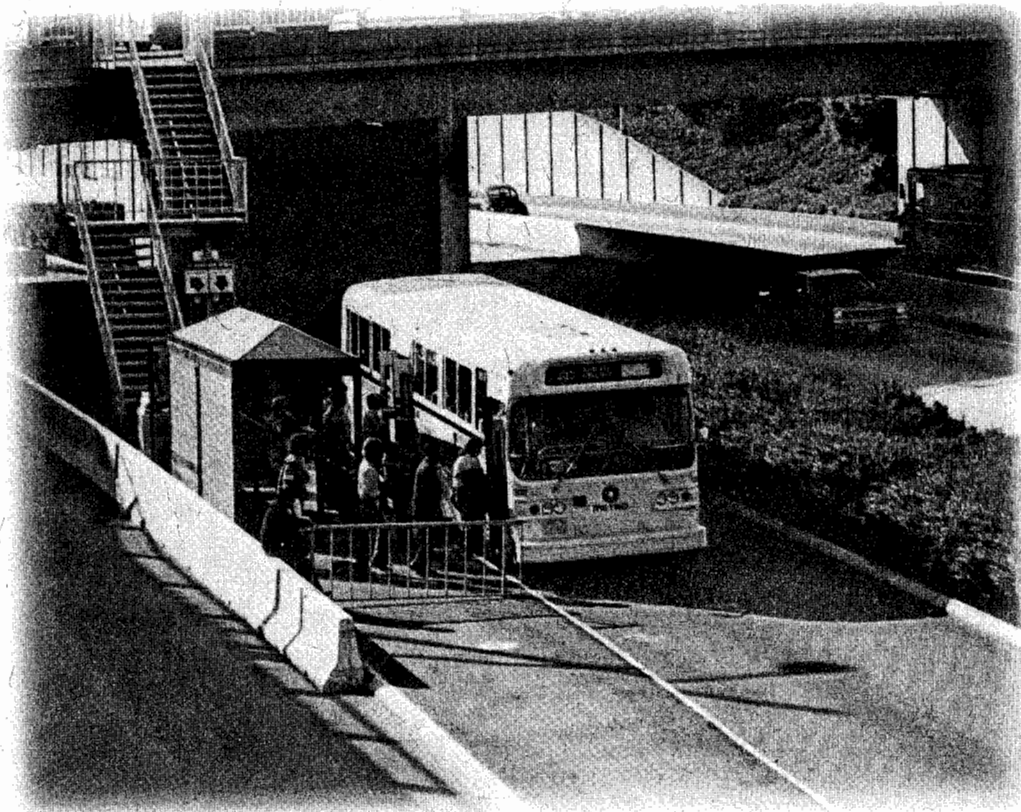
In early 1971, the Metro Council agreed it would operate a regional bus system if the state would authorize a tax subsidy. Councilmembers were convinced by the failure of the Forward Thrust proposals that property taxes could not be used to pay for mass transit and that another subsidy was necessary.

A citizens' committee chaired by Republican Joel Pritchard (Washington's lieutenant governor in 1995) and Democrat David Sprague (a Seattle businessman and former legislator who would serve later as chair of a transit advisory committee) recommended Metro be given authority to levy (voters willing) a sales tax of three tenths of one percent. The committee and others worked hard in Olympia. The Legislature, prompted by Sen. R.R. (Bob) Greive of West Seattle, gave Metro that authority in its 1971 session, sparking a new round of planning for a countywide bus operation.

Unlike the top-down process used in the Forward Thrust campaign, the effort to develop a plan for an all-bus system became a grassroots planning effort. Leading the charge were Larry Coffman, who worked as Metro's sole transit planner, Wally Toner, a Seattle consultant, and Wally DelaBarre and Arnold Cogan of Daniel, Mann, Johnson & Mendenhall (DMJM), the firm hired to design the regional bus plan. The group enlisted the public in drafting policies and standards and drawing bus routes.

Toner searched through county election records for the names of those who voted often and particularly in off-year school and special elections. "The theory was that people who voted schools and off-year elections consistently were the financial well spring of the community," Toner said.

Although targeting specific audiences is common in political campaigns of the 1990s, it was an unusual approach then. Toner developed the tactic in 1971, based on community organization work he had done for VISTA in the late 1960s.



Passengers at a "Freeway Flyer" stop board an express bus in the Montlake area of Seattle.

Ten thousand good voters received personal letters inviting them to a series of 50 planning meetings in 10 communities around the county.

Metro officials, members of DelaBarre's staff and Metro councilmembers attended meetings in schools, churches and community centers that attracted up to 50 people or more. Citizens drew lines on paper, recommending routes, and proposed policies they thought would make a bus system work for them.

The principle, Toner said, was "that no campaign can shine up a bad ballot measure. If the people haven't had a hand in developing the ballot measure, there is a good chance they will reject it."

The plan written by DMJM drew on Seattle Transit procedures and plans and citizen ideas, but it also offered some dramatic new approaches to bus service. While Seattle Transit pioneered express bus service, with its Blue Streak run from a Northgate park-and-ride lot to downtown Seattle, Metro Transit would have 25 express routes covering 650 miles. There would be 850 miles of service on 100 local routes, which would feed the express system and circulate in neighborhoods. Ridership would reach 57 million in 1980, the plan predicted.

DMJM proposed a series of "Freeway Flyer" stops on freeways at which express buses would stop to pick up passengers transferring from local buses. In addition, it called for 1,200 bus shelters and 50 park-and-ride lots with 16,000 parking spaces. The DMJM system required more transfers, which upset some riders accustomed to riding without transfer from their home neighborhood to jobs and shopping downtown, but it promised to speed service.

Voters approve transit plan

In September 1972, voters authorized Metro to take on the challenge of building a new countywide bus system and approved a sales-tax increase of three tenths of one percent to pay for it. (The Legislature in 1969 promised to share revenue from the state motor vehicle excise tax with transit, a promise Metro eventually would go to court to enforce.) Approval of Metro Transit and its new tax base was the first time voters had said yes to a transportation measure since 1918, when city residents approved the purchase of the privately owned Seattle Electric Street Railway.

Among those surprised by the election were Metro officials who really hadn't expected the measure to pass.

Although the Metro Council and its staff had done little pre-election planning for how a merged, countywide system would function, they rallied quickly. Under the direction of Charles V. (Tom) Gibbs, executive director of Metro, and Mercer Islander Aubrey Davis, chair of the council's Transit Committee, Metro put together a 100-day campaign to build the new system.

New routes were planned and schedules were written. Metro officials figured out how to take over purchasing,

personnel and other front-office chores from Seattle Transit and Metropolitan Transit. Tom Gibbs, Jim Ellis, Metro's legal counsel, and Dick Page, a former deputy mayor of Seattle working as Metro's director of Public Services, negotiated the purchase of the city transit system for \$6.5 million, with the money to be spent on transit improvements within the city. Metro paid \$1.2 million for Metropolitan Transit Corp. Bus drivers got in their cars and made trial runs on the new suburban routes they would be driving. "It was a fire drill," Gibbs said.

Davis balanced his business, position on the Mercer Island City Council and transit duties during the frantic 100 days. "It was a shotgun marriage," Davis would say of the merger. "We didn't have the liability of knowing what wouldn't work. We broke quite a few molds and made some mistakes."

Gibbs, Page and other Metro staffers knew little about bus operations. "We were so naive that it never occurred to us we couldn't make it happen," said Penny Peabody, who was Metro's media representative then and the first woman hired by Metro for a nonclerical position.

Metro Milestone

May 19, 1970

**A rail transit
proposal is
defeated in the
second Forward
Thrust election.**

Metro Milestone

Sept. 19, 1972

King County voters give Metro authority to develop a regional bus system and to levy a sales tax of three tenths of one percent to support it.

Seattle Transit employees naturally were concerned about their future. Their worry was not about their jobs, which were guaranteed by law, but about what it would be like working for another agency whose skills were in water pollution control and whose leaders knew nothing of their transit traditions.

"Emotions were very similar to those felt now," said Jim Patrick shortly before the merger of Metro and King County was completed in 1995. "It was a natural reaction to significant changes in our lives." Patrick started work as a driver for Seattle Transit in 1960 and retired from Metro more than 30 years later as deputy executive director.

To Patrick and others, however, one advantage was clear: Metro Transit would be financially secure, compared to the Seattle system, with sales and vehicle excise tax revenues flooding in. The tax receipts, more than \$15 million in 1973 the first year they were collected, would allow transit to prove it could do the job.

A necessary task in the first 100 days was naming the consolidated system. There was a contest and scores of names were offered, both goofy and inspired, including Clear Water Transit Works, Blue Streak Transit, Seattle-King County Metro, Komet, Kismet, KART, KAT and Rainwater Highball. But the simplest won.

Another challenge facing the new system was the development of a common color scheme for the bus fleet. Coaches inherited from Seattle Transit bore several colors, including red-and-gray and green-and-white patterns. Metropolitan Transit Corp. buses were painted "army green" and white. At one point in Metro Transit's first days there were 15 color schemes on transit buses working in Seattle, said Jess Dawson, who was superintendent of equipment then.

Aubrey Davis thought Metro Transit would use blue and green paint on its buses because they were Northwest colors. But committees and citizens had other ideas. The first new Metro buses, built by AM General, would come painted white, brown and ochre. The original pattern had swooping curves of color that were difficult to paint and which soon became straight bands. With the planned replacement of almost its entire diesel-bus fleet, Metro in 1995 decided on a new color scheme, combining vivid yellows and Northwest blue-greens. The design and color scheme were recommended by a team composed of the Metro Arts Committee, Metro employees and the public.

Public approval of the new transit system came in the nick of time. The Seattle bus system slowly was going broke. It had last bought new buses in 1963 and the cash held for new equipment had been spent on operations. In 1971, when Lloyd Graber retired after 30 years as manager of Seattle Transit, the system had a deficit of \$1 million. It was

a difficult time for a system that was proud of having operated on cash from the farebox for most of its history.

The Seattle City Council imposed a 50-cent monthly household tax (after voters forced the repeal of a \$1 tax) to help support transit and directed the city's lighting department to collect it. City Light, unhappy at raising funds for buses, marked the transit tax clearly on its bills, which many refused to pay.

Bus patronage was dwindling as freeways and a second Lake Washington bridge were built and families scattered into suburbia, beyond the reach of existing transit service.

During World War II, Seattle Transit carried 300 million riders a year because gas rationing forced workers to leave their cars at home and run for the bus every morning. By 1953 ridership dropped to 64.7 million. In its last year, 1972, Seattle Transit counted barely 30 million riders. The system was in a spiral of failure: When it cut service to reduce costs it lost paying passengers, forcing additional reductions in bus hours and miles, which cost it more riders and revenue.

The average bus was about 19 years old. Seattle was operating trolley buses that were built in the early 1940s and a fleet of gasoline-powered buses bought in 1952 that had logged nearly one million miles each. The big diesel coaches it had acquired a decade earlier for the Blue Streak

freeway express service offered the only hint of modernity; other than electric trolleys, only they had the horsepower to climb Queen Anne Hill with a load of passengers. It was amazing the system held together, but a skilled and professional team of transit mechanics and operators kept it rolling.

Clearly, Metropolitan Transit Corp., the private bus line offering suburban service, was in worse shape. It operated a fleet of tired and dilapidated highway coaches, many of them worn out at least once in previous Greyhound service. Metropolitan Transit Corp. didn't have a decent bus barn: it operated from a former taxi-cab garage on South Dearborn Street on the edge of Seattle's International District. Metropolitan drivers frequently serviced their own buses and many drove them home at night.

King County was subsidizing Metropolitan, handing over just enough cash to keep the buses rolling until Metro Transit could move in, plenty of money in its pockets, and buy up the failing company.



Brill trolley buses, built in the early 1940s, were among the fleet Metro inherited from Seattle Transit when the agency took over regional transit operations in 1973.

Ridership gains and growing pains

Husky fans crowd Metro buses following a University of Washington football game. Special service to sporting and community events helps ease traffic congestion.

Early in 1973, Metro began a national search for its first transit director. Carle Salley applied, came to Seattle from Pittsburgh and charmed the socks off the selection committee.

A true bus fanatic, Salley had a friendly smile and a bushy blond mustache. He will be remembered for several things: shaping Metro Transit by planning the purchase of the nation's first fleet of articulated (bending) buses and for drafting specifications for a huge fleet of buses so different no one would build them.



Metro officials, in campaigning for voter creation of Metro Transit, had promised they would buy no more diesel buses. The old buses then in service had ankle-level exhaust pipes that blasted people on sidewalks with diesel smoke and odor. They were very unpopular.

Salley seized on that promise and added more as he began drawing plans for a fleet of new buses: lower floors, wider doors, bigger windows, huge destination signs, quieter engines. There would be articulated motor coaches and trolley buses and standard-sized buses. Manufacturers would be asked to bid natural gas engines.

"He was a good hands-on person, creative and innovative," said Aubrey Davis, Transit Committee chair. It was Davis' feeling that Salley would have preferred designing buses to operating them.

In the spring of 1974, Salley sent his specifications for 605 motor and trolley buses to more than 50 manufacturers. In January 1975, Metro was embarrassed when not one maker bid on any part of the big order because of the radical specifications. Metro found itself buying most of its buses from foreign manufacturers.

"We were not able to shape the industry by moving in new directions," Davis said. "We were not told there would be no bids, but we got the signal we were doing too much."

Executive Director Dick Page said Metro would not give up its effort to buy a better bus. Later that year, however, faced with increasing ridership and a rapidly aging fleet, Metro bought 145 AM General buses.

New buses for the growing Metro Transit system were desperately needed. In late 1973, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries cut the flow of petroleum to the United States, causing a national fuel-supply crisis. That prompted Metro to add new routes and buy and lease used coaches to serve the additional riders who flocked to Metro buses.

The rapid increase in ridership was "a kick in the tail and a shot in the arm," said Bob Sokol, who moved from a driver's job to administration as the two systems merged in 1973.

Rick Walsh, a driver who would become deputy director of the Transit Department in future years, drove buses to Seattle from California, Texas and New Jersey. The New Jersey buses, to become known here as "Jersey Junkers," were worn out when Metro bought them. Half broke down as Metro operators and mechanics drove them to Seattle.

Walsh remembers the old buses rattling into Seattle carrying heaps of empty lube oil and transmission fluid containers.

"We kept buses we should have buried," Sokol said.

"Vehicle maintenance was and is sound, so there was time to keep the old junk running."

Metro paid \$8,000 each for the buses and then spent that much more on repairs when they arrived. "They looked nice, and they ran," Walsh said, "and they helped meet a 13 percent increase in ridership by the end of 1974."

For all the challenges and problems 1974 offered, things got worse at year end. Local 587 of the Amalgamated Transit Union staged a two-week strike, seeking better pay and medical benefits. Metro was new to big union negotiations, and the local was suffering from dissension within its ranks. Young members formed the Ralph Kramden Caucus (for the bus driver character played by Jackie Gleason on the early, early black-and-white TV sitcom "Honeymooners") and nipped at the heels of the old-boy leadership that worked out contracts and other issues with Seattle Transit management over dinner and drinks at the Bush Garden Restaurant.

With transit ridership on the rise, Salley persisted in his efforts to find a better bus for Metro. He took Metro councilmembers and staffers to Europe to see articulated

Metro Milestone

Oct. 8, 1972

Congress passes the Clean Water Act, requiring all sewer agencies to provide secondary treatment. Metro will seek a waiver of the requirement.

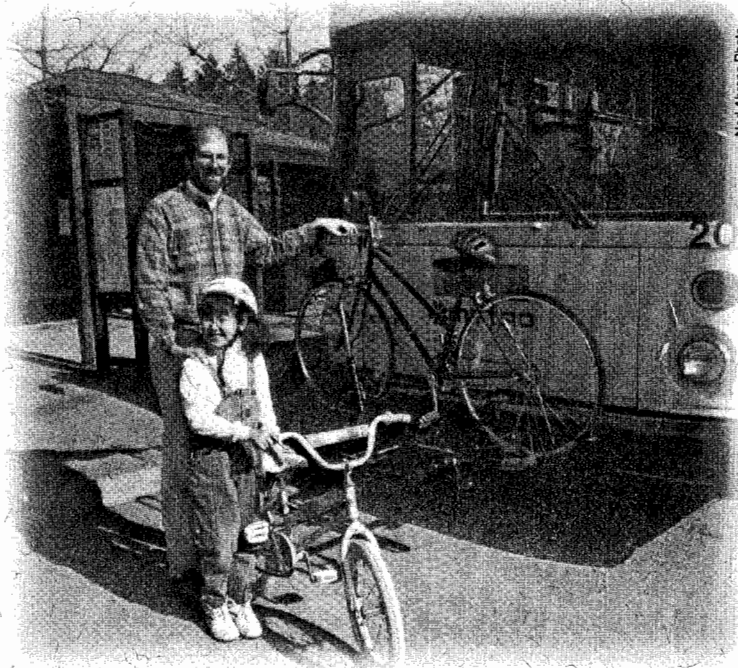
Metro Milestone

Jan. 1, 1973

Metro Transit
begins operation
with a base fare
of 20 cents.

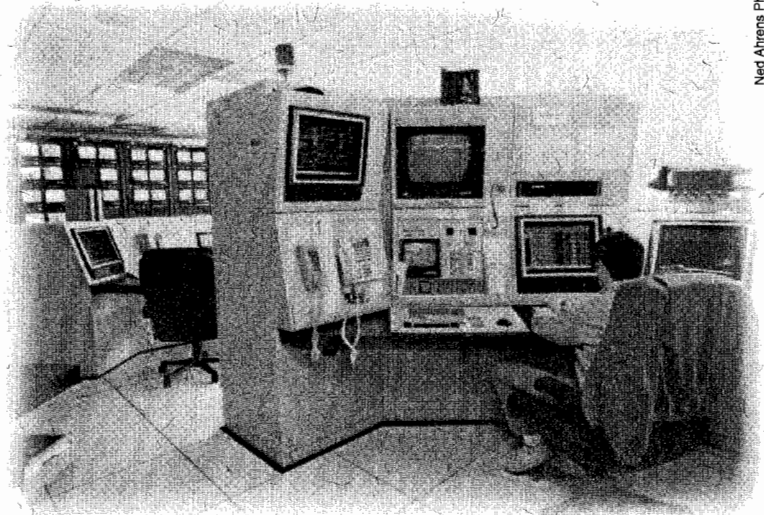
buses in action and continued to perfect specifications for Metro's first buy of the unusual coach. He would be gone from the agency long before the first M.A.N.-AM General artics were delivered in 1978, but his insistence on improved design and capacity would serve Metro well in the coming years.

Another legacy of Salley's tenure as transit director is the ride-free area in downtown Seattle. Mayor Wes Uhlman's office proposed that bus travel downtown be free. Salley worked out the details, gave it the name "Magic Carpet" and devised the scheme, still in service in 1995, under which outbound riders pay upon reaching their destination.



Ned Ahrens Photo

That allowed buses to open both doors at downtown stops, greatly speeding up loading and unloading. In 1993, Metro resumed collecting fares downtown during late night and early morning hours to give operators more control over who boards buses and to reduce the likelihood of violence against operators and passengers.



Ned Ahrens Photo

Transit employees work behind the scenes to keep service and systems operating safely and efficiently in the downtown Seattle transit tunnel.

Data management coordinator Mark Gorow and daughter demonstrate how to use a bicycle rack on a Metro bus. Metro Transit boasts the largest fleet of bike-rack-equipped buses in the nation.

Conductor Eldo Kanikheberg pulls "Old 99," the Waterfront Streetcar, into the Madison Street Station on Seattle's waterfront.



Ned Ahrens Photo

Ned Ahrens Photo



Councilmember George Benson, left, who spearheaded an effort to bring vintage Australian streetcars to Seattle's waterfront, enjoys congratulatory applause during an event in his honor in June 1992. Joining Benson on the podium is Paul Toliver, who became Metro's transit director in 1988.

Expansion brings artics, part-time drivers

About 3:30 in the morning one day in 1977, Transit Director Charles (Chuck) Collins looked out the window of Metro's old North Base (across from the Seattle Center) and was amazed to see buses heading out.

Because he was in a contract-negotiating meeting with Local 587 of the Amalgamated Transit Union, there were

plenty of transit administrators present. Collins asked why buses were rolling so early in the morning when no one was out waiting for a bus.

The answer he remembers: "We've always done that."

Collins later discovered the early-morning runs were left over from World War II when the old Seattle Transit System scheduled early buses to get Bremerton shipyard workers to the Colman ferry dock downtown. His staff dug through Metro's schedules and discovered similar oddball runs that cost as much as peak-hour buses but produced no riders. Collins wiped them all out and added the hours of service when people wanted to ride the bus.

Executive Director Dick Page hired Collins early in 1976, replacing Carle Salley. Collins, an aide to King County Executive John Spellman, moved his office only two blocks from the Courthouse to Metro's new headquarters in the Pioneer Building. He had no transit experience.

Collins arrived to find the fledgling bus system in serious trouble. It was facing a deficit, the result of the addition of new service without considering the long-range financial consequences. The state Legislature was refusing to



Ned Ahrens Photo

With a warm handshake, John Van Dyke, right, is congratulated as operator of the year during an August 1987 ceremony.

distribute Metro's share of the motor vehicle excise tax. There were discipline problems and a high accident rate.

Rick Walsh, deputy transit director, was a driver when Seattle Transit merged with Metro. "In 1973, the system functioned fairly well. There was a great spirit, a holdover spirit from Seattle Transit. The staff was very professional, they had an attitude they could get anything done.

"What suffered, as in any rapid expansion, was that you lose focus on details," Walsh said.

What Collins wanted, according to Walsh, was "more accounting and professional management."

Collins requested that Metro purchase all the articulated buses the agency could afford because the 60-foot bending buses could carry 70 or more passengers and increase productivity. Then, after a computer study of the contract with Local 587, Collins took his most dramatic step: He called for the hiring of part-time bus drivers as a regular part of the transit work force.

Ned Ahrens Photo



Veteran bus driver Don Brady has a lot to smile about. Twice in his 20-year career he captured the top bus-driving award in an international competition.

Part-timers would be paid only for the runs they made in the morning or evening peak hours. They would receive few benefits. Metro would enjoy cost savings, and the bus system would be more productive.

"We operated a lot of the system two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening, and we did it economically," Collins said.

Penny Peabody, who served as executive director after Page resigned and before Neil Peterson was hired, said Metro was the first transit agency in the nation to hire part-time drivers. "It just meant thousands of more hours of bus service," she said. "We didn't have the revenue to support expansion, short of cutting Seattle service to support suburban expansion."

By 1995, nearly half of Metro's drivers were part-timers. The route to a full-time job begins with part-time assignments.

Metro Milestone

April 17, 1974

Richard S. Page
selected to
succeed Tom
Gibbs as
executive
director.

Metro Milestone

May 23, 1974

King County
Executive John
Spellman
suggests Metro
and the county
be consolidated.

Despite stiff union resistance, which included "sick-outs" that shut down up to 25 percent of the system at times, Collins won a contract allowing part-time drivers and imposing a new discipline system. Collins tied the change to the agency's goal of carrying 57 million passengers a year. "Even with the artics, we could not get there," he said. "We needed the part-time drivers to make the goal."

Henri Hartman, Metro's first woman base chief who started at Metro in 1975 as a computer operations supervisor, said: "Collins would not take no for an answer. He wanted to drag transit into the 20th century, and in three years he did it."

Collins continued to look for ways to improve. He stopped hiring by seniority, hired outsiders and broke the mold of middle management. He created a "war room" and a "hit parade," on which the route drawing the most customer complaints was posted. The rule was a route could stay on the list only two weeks.

Even though he shattered many old transit traditions, Collins found much to admire in the veterans who came to Metro from the semi-militaristic management system developed by Lloyd Graber over 30 years as director of Seattle Transit.

"There were hundreds of those wonderful things Graber left," Collins said. "He wouldn't let a bus go out with a scratch or visible damage. What was so much fun was

taking the best of two cultures and trying to mold one. There was one that was thoughtful, imaginative and committed. And there was one with a lot of wonderful operating traditions."

In 1977, the Metro Council boosted the base fare from 20 cents to 30 cents to make the budget balance and to pay for service improvements. Under Collins' leadership, Metro replaced its cumbersome 30-zone arrangement begun in 1973 with a simple two-zone system.

Collins left Metro in late 1979 knowing Metro Transit had exceeded its ridership goals. Passenger counts totaled 58.2 million in 1979 and 66 million in 1980, a doubling of ridership since 1973.



*Transit operator Larry Bach gets into
the holiday spirit.*

Bus fleet grows to meet service demands

Over the years, Metro bought 1,455 new buses. They included the first-ever articulated, or bending, buses used in North America. The agency added a total of 151 of the bending buses in 1978 and 1979, and 130 of them still were in service in 1995.

The fleet also includes 236 dual-power articulated buses used in the downtown Seattle transit tunnel. The 60-foot-long tunnel buses, which have both diesel and electric motors, are built by Breda, an Italian manufacturer of railroad cars and buses.

Metro also purchased 109 trolley buses in 1979 for the rebuilt and expanded trolley system, the first such renewal in the United States. Those buses, the first new trolleys built in America in many years, suffered startup problems but now are seasoned, reliable performers. Metro's fleet also includes 46 60-foot bending trolleys delivered in 1987 and 157 M.A.N. 40-foot diesel buses.

In one of its last acts in 1993, the Metro Council ordered a fleet of buses that would burn natural gas and launch Metro toward eventual conversion of the entire diesel fleet. Critics complained natural-gas buses would cost

too much and would do nothing to improve air quality, but the council insisted.

Newly elected King County Executive Gary Locke, however, canceled the natural-gas bus order and approved the purchase of a fleet of 360 clean-burning diesel buses that will be among the most sophisticated ever purchased here.

The zoo bus, a project of the Central Base Drive for Excellence program, whisks riders from West Seattle to the Woodland Park Zoo.



Neil Athrens Photo

Innovation drives transit system

One needed to be hale and hearty to ride buses in Seattle in the good old days. You needed the ability to climb steep steps into the bus and then the strength to hold on while it swerved through traffic. Bus design was not done with people who used wheelchairs in mind.

In 1978, the Metro Council leaped ahead of the rest of the nation and ordered wheelchair lifts on a fleet of 109 new trolley buses. In 1995, nearly 1,000 of Metro's fleet of about 1,150 buses were lift-equipped and about 95 percent of all weekday runs are handled by accessible coaches.

AM General won a contract in 1978 from Metro to build the electric trolley buses. Ten trolleys were delivered early

Demand for vanpools has grown steadily since the city of Seattle transferred its fleet to Metro in 1984.



Ned Arrens Photo

for testing and Metro discovered the AM General-installed wheelchair lifts didn't work. Metro told AM General to stop adding lifts to buses on the production line.

Ed Hall, a Metro engineer, began designing a lift. Eventually, it would become an industry standard and sold nationally as the Lift U Lift. In 1979, Metro bought a fleet of 259 Flyer motor coaches and all came equipped with Hall's lift in place. Later, Metro would install them on the trolley buses and all of Metro's lifts would be of Hall design. While mainline transit buses equipped with lifts were at the heart of Metro's policy for aiding riders with disabilities and elderly riders, it wasn't enough. Not all passengers were capable of riding standard coaches and some needed more personal and door-to-door service.

In 1979, Metro Transit began a program under which it subsidized half the cost of taxi service for qualifying low-income elderly and disabled persons. In addition, it began door-to-door reserve-a-ride van service, mostly for patrons in outlying areas. Non-profit social service agencies operated the vans under contract with Metro.

Service to this group of passengers was so important to Metro that the Metro Council appointed a special Elderly

and Handicapped Transit Advisory Committee to offer guidance on transportation issues. Vanpools were another innovation designed to serve those whose needs could not be met with mainline transit buses.

Seattle started a commuter pool with 21 vans during the fuel-supply crisis of 1979. It was transferred to Metro, with 130 vans, in 1984. The system expanded again in 1987 when the Boeing Co. transferred its fleet of 100 vans and 65 vanpool groups to Metro.

In 1994, the van program tallied 2.7 million passenger trips. Passenger fares, the sale of surplus vans, grants and a self-insurance reserve cover all of the capital and operating costs and about 45 percent of administrative costs. By 1995, more than 530 vans were in use.

Metro's vanpool program twice has won the public leadership award of the National Association for Commuter Transportation.

Use of vanpools leaves a little more space on area freeways and arterials for those who can't give up the auto. Metro estimates that operation of 500 vanpools means about



Metro began providing wheelchair lifts aboard its buses long before the federal government required coaches to become accessible to riders with disabilities.

(DART) program in Federal Way. DART service began in the Issaquah area in 1993, and in 1995 the Federal Way system was modified to allow the small buses to deviate from fixed routes to better serve customers.

In 1995, Metro and Seattle began an experimental program called LINC that provided neighborhood service in Ballard using small buses. Drivers dropped patrons at regular transit stops, or almost anywhere else they wanted to go within the boundaries of the service area. That kind of service is expected to become more common in the city as Seattle develops the urban-village segments of its new comprehensive plan.

4,500 autos are left at home each day. Again, recognizing that a regular 40-foot bus doesn't serve every commuting need, Metro in 1977 began experimenting with what it called paratransit service. Essentially, it was bus service provided by smaller vehicles seating 15 to 24 persons.

By 1995, paratransit had been renamed subcontracted transit service and Metro was operating 100,000 hours of annual service on 29 routes. In 1994, the system carried 730,000 passengers. In 1992, Metro began offering an experimental dial-a-ride

Metro Milestone

Sept. 9, 1976

**Metro estimates
it will cost \$700
million and take
30 years to make
area waters
"squeaky clean."**

Metro Milestone

July 13, 1977

Neil Peterson
succeeds Dick
Page as executive
director.

Merger proposal surfaces

In May 1974, County Executive John Spellman launched a trial balloon. Let us, he said, merge King County and Metro. It was not the first time it was suggested. It would not be the last. Early in 1975, a Metropolitan Study Commission appointed by Seattle, the county and suburban mayors recommended that all urban areas be placed under one government. In essence, it was proposing a two-tier government: one to manage regional things, like water, transit, planning, sewage disposal, and a second level of town governments to provide local services.

Other suggestions continued to bubble in the political pot. One proposal would have put the merger issue to the public in a complicated two-vote process. Another idea, quickly squelched, would have allowed the County Council, by a simple majority vote, to take over Metro. It was proposed by state Sen. Gary Grant, who as a King County councilmember in later years, continued to argue for a merger.

Metro, other critics complained, had become a de facto land-use planner because of the way it built new sewer lines.

In June 1977, Gov. Dixy Lee Ray signed legislation authorizing a merger election in November 1978, or later. Then, in October 1977, a King County Charter Review

Committee appointed by Spellman recommended merger and creation of a 17-member Metropolitan King County Council. The County Council finally scheduled a merger vote for November 1979.

Meanwhile, the Metro Council began looking at ways it could reorganize to meet the criticism that it was not representative. Neil Peterson, Metro's new executive director, said a study showed only Seattle was proportionately represented on the Metro Council, with 40 percent of the county population and 40 percent of the vote on the council. Unincorporated areas had 37 percent of the population and 24 percent of the council seats. Small cities had 17 percent of the population and held 32 percent of council seats. It would not be the council's only such look at restructuring.

As the election neared, a citizens' committee was formed to oppose the merger, with Madeline Lemere as chair. She had been part of the citizens' effort that led to creation of Metro in 1958. Gary Grant, however, continued to argue that the Metro Council was not accountable to voters.

On Nov. 6, 1979, it wasn't even close. County voters, well aware of the water quality and transit work Metro had done, voted three to one against the merger proposal.

Metro employees load barrels of food onto an articulated bus during an annual food drive to fight hunger.

Employees show heart and soul

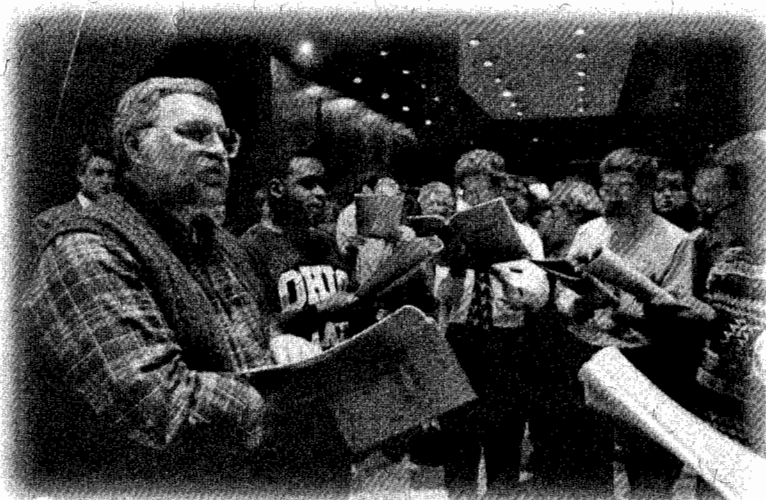


Ned Ahrens Photo



Ned Ahrens Photo

Transit and water—Metro's two main functions—come together during the Seafair milk carton derby race at Green Lake in July 1989.



Exchange Building employees, led by Carl Johansen, left, enjoy holiday-season caroling in 1994.

Ned Ahrens Photo



Ned Ahrens Photo

In 1983, maintenance workers at East Base celebrate after being named by the U.S. General Accounting Office as having the top preventive maintenance program in the country.

Honors and awards

Over the years Metro received scores of honors and awards, and many of its staff were individually recognized for their accomplishments. They include:

1960

Metro and its component cities received the Look magazine "All-America Award" for the citizen effort creating Metro.

1983

Metro Transit designated as the best major transit system in the U.S. by the American Public Transit Association.

1986

Honor Award from the Seattle Chapter of the American Institute of Architects for design of the water quality laboratory.

1987

American Consulting Engineers' Council gives its Award of Engineering Excellence to Metro for

engineering design of the Renton effluent transfer system; the Pacific Northwest Council of the American Society of Civil Engineers gives Metro its Achievement Award for the same project.

Metro and Seattle honored by Washington Environmental Council for their Hanford tunnel separation project.

1988

Metro's vanpool program honored by Urban Mass Transit Administration for its safety program.

U.S. Department of Transportation cites Metro Transit's maintenance program as the best among public transit agencies.

The Waterfront Streetcar receives an Honor Award from the Waterfront Center of Washington, D.C.

The East Division enjoyed a remarkable year: award of excellence from the Department of Ecology; award of excellence from EPA Region X; national EPA first place award for outstanding wastewater treatment facility.

1989

West Division receives American Public Works Association designation for a Project of Historical Significance for cleanup of Lake Washington, 1959 - 1989; it also receives an Operations Award from the Association of Metropolitan Sewerage Agencies.

1990

The Washington Society of Professional Engineers selects the downtown bus tunnel for its Outstanding Engineering Achievement.

The American Institute of Architects presents its Commendation Award to Metro for tunnel station design.

1991

The downtown Seattle Transportation Project receives the American Consulting Engineers Council Engineering Excellence-Grand Award.

1992

For the second time, the American Public Transit Association selects Metro Transit as the best major city system in the United States.

Metro Milestone

Nov. 6, 1979

**King County
proposal to
merge with
Metro is defeated
overwhelmingly.**

Metro Milestone

Dec. 19, 1979

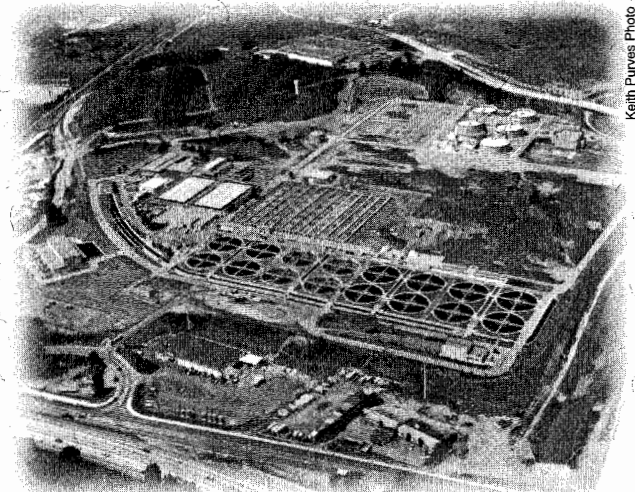
Jim Ellis, who had served as general counsel for Metro since October 1958, is honored at a civic banquet on his retirement.

Lighting the way to a brighter transportation future, the Downtown Seattle Transit Project required a combination of construction methods.



Ned Ahrens Photo

An aerial view of a construction project to enlarge the capacity of the East Division Reclamation Plant near Renton. Work on the \$230 million project began in 1991.



Keith Purves Photo



Ned Ahrens Photo

Employees working in the West Point capital project division, Technical Services Department, review work plans at the project site in 1992. From left are Alberta George, Tony Morris, Adam Strutynski and Paul Galeno.